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Permutations of Islamism

Departmental Honors Thesis in International Affairs

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Professor Victoria Hunter, and Professor Curtis Bell**

April 4, 2012

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Preface

This project is something that I have been interested in throughout my academic career. I first began studying the Middle East and Islam in the fall of my junior year, and was immediately interested in the religious tradition and the area of the world. However, the conflict between American popular understandings of Islam and the reality of the tradition is something I have been interested in since high school. I grew up with a number of Iranian and Egyptian friends, all of whom were Muslim.

When the Twin Towers fell, and when I would talk to certain friends and family about their belief that Islam was oppressive, I struggled to reconcile this with my own experience with Islam. I had never understood the tradition as oppressive, and rather, had noticed a variety of different beliefs and practices within Islam throughout my life. I grew up Catholic and myself was exposed to varying degrees of practice and, and difference in interpretation of religious text in my own upbringing. I never saw a difference in my friends' discussions of growing up in the Muslim tradition. It is also worth noting that I did not only see this fear of Islam in the United States. When I studied in Paris, the law banning burquas was being introduced, and I remember hearing this discussion, and again wondering why there was so much resistance to the religion.

I initially set out to write a thesis specifically focusing on the religious rhetoric of the Taliban, and the project very quickly grew into a study of political Islam, and its historical developments. The project developed with my research, and I found that I was very interested in examining political Islam in light of what I perceive to be misconceptions of Islamism throughout the world. Even as I started with the goal of deconstructing these misconceptions, my findings proved that political Islam, and Islam itself was an even more diverse tradition than I initially understood.

Abstract

This paper seeks to understand the ways that popular American media images and Western understandings of Islamism are unrepresentative of the tradition. Modern day media bombards the Western world with images of women in burquas, and extremist Islamist statements and evaluates these ideas and images with “Islamism”. This paper shows, however that Islamism cannot be understood as a simple term, but is rather a complex network of ideas and values.

As the three case studies- the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and the Muslim Brotherhood highlight the complex nature of the term Islamism. The Taliban was a parochial organization that aimed to mimic the times of the Prophet during its period of dominance in the late 1990's, but reformed itself and became a more modern insurgent movement post-2001. Al-Qaeda, meanwhile, demonstrates radical ideas about the nature of Sharia' and international Islamic governance. Finally, the Muslim Brotherhood illuminates how Islamist policies can promote democracy. The stark differences among these Islamist organizations supports the claim that Islamism is not one simple definition, but rather, represents a variety of organizations and ideas that are constantly evolving.

Introduction to the Topic

Western views are often misrepresentative of Islamism. The United States' difficulties with the Islamic world, in addition to 9/11's negative media attention caused the Western world to view Islamism as dangerous and regressive, rather than a philosophy that embraces contemporary ideas and modernity as the West understands it. Immediately following 9/11, videotapes of Osama bin Laden played on every major news channel with anti-Western statements, as well as clips of American flags being burned throughout the Islamic world. A narrow understanding of Islamism and the Islamic world grew from these media images, one this paper hopes to debunk. The general American public does not understand the nuances of political Islam, and the drive behind such philosophies. The question that this paper aims to answer is: How does political Islam develop into the different forms represented today, and how should this inform America's relationship with the Middle East?

As this paper will show, Islamism appears within a broad range of ideological discourses and political beliefs, and does not represent simply the narrow understanding of Islamism implied by Western thought. Islamism does not simply aim to cripple the Western world, as many Americans

understand that it does, but rather, a political ideology that develops from a rich tradition of scholarship and discourse. Because of the varied misperceptions surrounding Islamism, it is especially important to highlight this rich tradition, and explain the ways in which Islamism is, within itself, becoming extremely progressive.

In the current Republican primary, there are many comments made about the Muslim community, and the behavior of Islamist organizations. For example, in a speech to the American public, Newt Gingrich likened the desire to build a mosque in the financial district of New York City to “Nazis building next to a Holocaust museum”¹. While this is clearly a sweeping generalization, it highlights the belief that Americans have that Islam is attacking their own identity and is offensive. The purpose of this paper is to explore the variety of organizations and ideologies within the tradition that are not explored by the blanket statements.

Because of these blanket statements, and the American public’s lack of understanding on the topic, this study does not attempt to understand Islamism as one cohesive philosophy, but rather, seeks to unpack the term through the three case studies, and understand some of the different ways in which Islamism can manifest itself, and the different political visions that Islamism proposes. For the broader understanding of the term, Islamism

¹ Islamaphobiatoday.com

means a political ideology with roots in Islam². As this definition is redefined through literature and the aforementioned case studies, it will be understood the many different visions this broad, umbrella term can produce. This paper examines the different ways in which different Islamist organizations interpret Islam for political ends.

The examination of this topic is important to develop a deeper understanding of the Islamic tradition, and to understand the fundamental crises in the Islamic world today. Both the Arab Awakening and the rise of fundamentalist groups like Al-Qaeda demonstrate crisis within Islamic society, and cause one to further question how Islam should manifest itself in politics. The purpose of this study is to highlight the challenges that Islam faces in the 21st century, and how Islamism's development and different representations represent this crisis. This study also aims to de-bunk Western understandings of Islamism as a tradition steeped in fundamentalism, and aims to highlight the reasons why Western understandings represent vast oversimplification.

Hypothesis

With regards to the stated research question, this paper should find that political Islam is represented in comparatively diverse ways today

² Mark Lynch, *"Veiled Truths: The Rise of Political Islam in the West"*, (Foreign Affairs: July 2010)

because of the specific historical contexts that scholarship, and the specific movements grow from specific historical contexts and developments. The case studies demonstrate that Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and the Muslim Brotherhood change significantly as a result of the political and social times in which they find themselves in. This study also finds that “Islamism” itself, and the idea of political Islam is not representative of the tradition itself, and the reasoning behind asserting political ideas of Islam. As this paper will illustrate, Islam itself has political specifications, and for followers of the tradition, it is important to adhere to these political specifications.

What this means for the US relationship with the Middle East is an increased understanding of the nuanced nature of Islamist parties. Perpetuating a generalized idea of the tradition will only fuel misunderstanding and increasingly strained relations. As the United States attempts to relate to a region changed by the Arab Awakening, and the emerging democracies that will come from this, political Islam must be understood in the previously stated terms.

Methodology

This paper first examines the historical context of political Islam as a tradition. In this section, there will be an examination of prominent Islamist scholars, particularly scholars that relate to the chosen case studies. After an

examination of the historical context, a review of the literature related to the topic will be conducted.

This paper will specifically examine three case studies: Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and the Muslim Brotherhood. These three case studies were chosen because of their relation to the American public's understanding of Islamism. Al-Qaeda brought Islamism into popular media and foreign policy in the United States. The United States has had a great deal of interaction with the Taliban over the course of the war in Afghanistan, and the Taliban is also an important part of US foreign policy in Afghanistan. The Muslim Brotherhood has recently come to public attention following the uprising in Egypt, and the subsequent elections. The Brotherhood is also one of the oldest and most successful Islamist organizations. Al-Qaeda will be the first case study because of its role in bringing Islamism into the American public's eye following 9/11, and the Taliban will follow because of the subsequent war in Afghanistan. The Muslim Brotherhood will be the final case study because of the very recent media attention it has received, and because of its unique approach to the democratic process.

These three case studies will highlight the disconnect between commonly held ideas about Islamism, and the actuality. Findings will be

included in each of the case studies, and afterwards, the paper will conclude by re-evaluating the hypothesis.

Historical Context

Islam has been an intrinsic factor in the governance of the Middle East since the time of the Prophet and the early *ummah* in Arabia in mid first century. There are, however, historical events that lead to the explicit discussion of Islam in politics, and the role of Islam in governance. Prior to explicit discussions of the term “Islamism”, the beginnings of Islamist thought began to stir as early as the 15th century, when many Islamic scholars called for a return to the focus on the Qur’an and the hadith (hereinafter the proof texts). Modern Islamist thought was born with a wave of Arab nationalism that swept the Middle East. Historian C. Ernest Dawn, an expert on the Ottoman empire, focuses on the end of the First World War when he says, “Since 1918 the doctrine that the Arabs are a nation and that nationality is the basis of politics has come to be accepted by a very large majority of Arab political leaders and of at least the lay intellectuals”³. During this time, Arabism as a national identity became particularly prominent. As Arabs throughout the Middle East expressed a desire to be independent from the Ottoman Empire, and colonial powers, the question of religion also came

³ C. Ernest Dawn, *“From Ottomanism to Arabism: The Origin of an Ideology”*, (London: 2004), 375

into play. By the 1950's, nationalist writing and ideas of how Islam would be involved in new Arab states were intertwined.

The concept of “political Islam” or “Islamism” first entered Western public discourse in the wake of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, but is also “an American coinage...that presupposed that an ‘apolitical Islam’ had been the norm...before 1979”⁴. Therefore, understanding Islamism as “political Islam” does not understand fundamental tenants and aspects of the term. To understand the real roots of Islamism, one must go back, at least, to France in 1883. At a conference at the Sorbonne on March 20, 1883, a Muslim figure named Sayyid Jamal al-Afghani was in attendance, and threw himself into a debate that discussed the position of Islam with regard to modernization and science⁵. Prior to this discussion, the French had referenced “Islamism”. They did so simply as a means to define the religion of “Islam”. Islamism was not understood as a separate philosophy or ideology than the religion of Islam itself, mostly because of a lack of Western understanding of the political aspects of Islam. The existence of Islamic empires, particularly the Persian and Ottoman empire, mean that ideas about Islamic governance did exist prior to 1883, but the Western world did not devote a great deal of study or literature to it.

⁴ International Crisis Group, “*Understanding Islamism*”, (Cairo/Brussels: 2005), 2

⁵ Mehdi Mozafarri, “*What is Islamism? History and a Definition of a Concept*”, (Routledge: London 2007), 18

Armstrong, a religious scholar at Oxford University, argues that the questioning of what a modern Muslim state was, and how religion played a role in such a state, stemmed from the arrival of the West in the Middle East, which began in 1750 and has continued through today. Religious scholar Karen Armstrong states “...the West had found it necessary to separate religion and politics in order to free government, science and technology from the constraints of conservative religion”⁶. However, a large majority of the Muslim world did not want a state in which religion was separate from state affairs, which lead many Muslims living under Imperial powers to question and assert the role of Islam in governance. Armstrong also focuses on the importance of Islam in the emergence of nationalism as a cause of Western influence, “The unity of the *ummah* had long been a treasured ideal; now the Muslim world was split into kingdoms and republics, whose borders were arbitrarily drawn up by Western powers”⁷.

In much of the scholarship following World War II, one can see the emergence of intellectuals who call for a return to the use of the proof texts as a means of creating a society that would be true to *Allah*—which, in a Muslim context, means “...the creation of a just society in which the individual could more easily make that existential surrender to his or her

⁶ Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A Short History*, (New York: 2002), 126

⁷ Ibid, 127

whole being that would bring fulfillment”⁸. As Armstrong illustrates, the need to re-assert the importance of the proof texts in governance and in the *ummah* was linked to the presence of Western powers and Western ideas of secularism. Colonialism had a great deal to do with this need. Following the World War II, many areas with primarily Arab populations pushed back against the colonial powers that governed much of the Arab world. Because colonial powers had been so involved in governance throughout the Middle East, nationalism and a call to Islamic governance were very much reactions to this.

As nationalist sentiment became more prominent within the Middle East, there are a number of prominent scholars that become extremely important to groups advocating for a more Islamist approach to politics, and scholars who also become extremely important to Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and the Muslim Brotherhood. Because of the aforementioned case studies, it will be important to look at the developments of Muhammad ibn ‘Abdul Wahhab, Sayyid Qutb, and Abdul A’la Maududi.

Muhammad ibn ‘Abdul Wahhab did not began writing about the importance of Islam in politics after World War I, but began scholarship in the nineteenth century, far before Islamist thought began to take root in political discourse. Wahhab is charged by many in the West as “...the

⁸ Ibid., 126

legendary mastermind of a 'pre-modern,' 'fundamentalist,' 'puritanical,' 'regressive,' 'violent,' political movement and, concomitantly, the inspiration for present-day militant Muslim sects in struggle against modernity"⁹. Wahhab was a moral critic primarily, and aimed to critique the practices of *islah* and *tajdid* (critique and reform). Wahhab saw "...pervasive moral laxity..."¹⁰, and promoted the notion of *tawhid*, the absolute Unity of God, which promotes the idea that nothing can be compared to God. Wahhab denounced the use of *taqlid* (human reason) in interpreting the proof texts, and saw *Allah* as a transcendent being, rather than an imminent being. Seeing *Allah* as a transcendent being reflects the idea that human beings cannot hope to understand God, but rather, that one must follow his teachings to achieve eternal salvation. This notion is important for the study of Islamism because Islamist organizations will fall on different parts of the spectrum with regard to *tawhid* or *taqlid*—whether or not an individual should embrace the proof texts by accepting already existing understanding, or using one's own reason.

In terms of political ramifications, this supposes that there must be a community in which "...Muslims are bound to each other through a set of

⁹ Samira Haj, *Reordering Islamic Orthodoxy: Muhammad ibn 'Abdul Wahhab*, (New York), 333

¹⁰ Ibid., 337

authoritative texts and practices”¹¹. Wahhab’s ideas and suggestions are important for future and ideological development of both Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Wahhab also represents the ideological basis of jihadist thought in both of these organizations. In October of 2001, the The New York Times stated “The faith that drives Osama bin Laden and his followers is a particularly austere and conservative brand of Islam known as Wahhabism...”¹².

Though Wahhab became important for later Islamist organizations, it is important to note that Wahhab’s ideas were not explicitly political in nature. Though his emphasis on *tawhid* implies many ideas about the way in which the Muslim community should govern themselves, Wahhab does not explicitly suggest policy prescriptions for such governance. Rather, it is assessed in a religious sense. Wahhabi thought was used in political governance first by the al-Saud family in Saudi Arabia as a means of uniting the more nomadic tribes throughout the Arabian peninsula, and was also used as a way to combat communism that threatened the al-Saud family following World War II.¹³ It is therefore an ideology that can be used as a vehicle for Islamist forms of governance. Thus, when one examines the ways

¹¹ Ibid., 339

¹² Ibid., 333

¹³ The Maghreb Center, “*Political Islam*”,
<http://themaghrebcenter.wordpress.com/hot-topics/political-islam/>

in which Al-Qa'ida and other Islamist groups read Wahhab, one must understand the ways in which his ideas are represented in pure form, and how they are applied to Islamist thought. As discussed previously, the idea of the broader *ummah* is intrinsically linked with Islam because of the role that Muhammad's early governance of the community played in establishing Islam as a religion. The *ummah*, and its governance is mentioned throughout the Qur'an. Therefore, when Wahhab mentions the *ummah*, and discusses this in his writings, it does not make his ideas specifically Islamist in nature.

Another important historical figure in the development of the term "Islamism" is Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian ideologue who was the first figure to explicitly discuss the role of Islam in developing the state and society. Qutb is generally credited with developing the philosophical basis of the Muslim Brotherhood, and other organizations in the post-colonial Middle East. Qutb believed that the West had so permanently affected politics and society in the Middle East, particularly Egypt, that citizens of these countries were living in a state of *jahiliyya*-meaning ignorance of the "divine mandate"¹⁴, or the time before Islamic enlightenment. Qutb's philosophy on Islamism is also very different, and can be interpreted as the founding of Islamism because of its explicitly political nature. Qutb promotes the idea that alternatives to the

¹⁴ John Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism*, (Columbia/Hurst: New York, 2010), 1

current administration should be searched for, and those who sought to live under Islam should vehemently resist that current administration, which ensured that Qutb became an extremely important figure in post-colonial nationalist movements¹⁵. With Wahhab, references to Islam in politics is implicit, while Qutb is explicit with these references. This makes Qutb somewhat revolutionary in academic discourse on Islam.

Qutb was a revolutionary reacting primarily to foreign influence in Egypt, and after independence, an administration that did not incorporate Islamic ideas into their governance enough for Qutb's taste. Therefore, Qutb is particularly popular to Islamist groups that operate within individual states, and seek to undermine a specific regime. "...in the 1970s, Marwan Hadid and his Syrian Muslim Brother colleagues drew upon the writings of Qutb in launching their *jihad* against the 'Alawi-dominated Ba'thist regime in Damascus"¹⁶. When discussing the idea of *jihad*, Qutb does so in reference to intrastate politics, rather than discussing a global jihad.

Qutb is a pivotal figure for the Muslim Brotherhood and the Taliban in particular. Qutb's teachings become extremely important to the Muslim Brotherhood, particularly in their later years, and Qutb continues to be an important part of the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood today. Al-Qaeda's

¹⁵ Ibid., 2

¹⁶ Ibid., 4

ideological philosophy with regard to *jihad* also draws a great deal from Qutb. Though this is taken out of context by Al-Qaeda, it is important to remember that Qutb is the first Islamic scholar to view jihad as both an offensive and defensive mechanism. For Qutb, *jihad* can be offensive in very specific circumstances. Qutb claims, "If we insist on calling Islamic *jihad* a defensive movement, then we must change the word 'defense' and mean by it the 'defense of man'..."¹⁷. In this quote, Qutb demonstrates that he believes defense should not only mean immediate response to attack, but also to a response to attacks on the freedom of members of the *islamiyyah* (the Muslim community). These ideas will later be used by Al-Qaeda in defense of attacks like the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States.

Qutb's reinterpretation of the term *jahaliyya* is extremely important to later developments of political Islam. Prior to intellectual development in political Islam, *jahaliyya* referred to the time of ignorance before Islam, and before the establishment of the early *ummah* in Arabia. Qutb refers to this term in his writings on *jihad*, but instead morphs the term to refer not only to a time of ignorance before the knowledge of *Allah*, but also to secularism and modernity. Esposito states "Sayyid Qutb interpreted jahaliyyah as the domination of humans over humans, rather than submission of humans to

¹⁷ Sayyid Qutb, *War, Peace, and Islamic Jihad*, (New York: 2002), 224

God”¹⁸. As this paper will later explore through the case studies, militant Islamist groups, such as Al-Qa’ida and the Taliban, and Islamist organizations that desire governance under divine law, like the Muslim Brotherhood often refer to this definition of *jahaliyyah* in defense of the need for a country, or world, ruled by *Allah*, and not by man.

A third extremely important scholar, who wrote slightly earlier than Qutb and was an important ideological figure for many of Qutb’s ideas, is Abul A’la Maududi. Maududi focuses more on the global *jihad* than state-specific *jihad*—ideas that will become integral in Al-Qaeda’s *jihad* against the West. Maududi is extremely important in understanding modern day jihadist thought, and puts a great deal of focus into re-defining the idea of *jihad*, and de-bunking Western understandings of *jihad*. Maududi identified some common misconceptions that shape Western understandings of *jihad*. In Maududi’s eyes, Islam cannot be understood as a religion in the Judeo-Christian sense. Maududi states “In common terminology ‘religion’ means nothing more than a hotch potch of some beliefs and, prayers, and rituals”¹⁹. Maududi sees this definition of religion as something that necessitates that religion be kept to the private sphere. However, Maududi understands Islam as a “revolutionary ideology and programme which seeks to alter the social

¹⁸ John L. Esposito, *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, (Oxford: 2003), 154

¹⁹ Abul A’la Maududi, *Jihad in Islam*, (Lebanon: 1939), 4

order of the world and rebuild it in conformity with its own tenets and ideals.”²⁰. This is key to understanding the broader philosophy of political Islam, but also highlights understandings in the Muslim community that have existed since the *ummah* of the Prophet. Maududi asserts this because of the Western world’s failure to understand these aspects of Islam lead to misunderstandings of its purpose. Particularly because Islam has the reference of the early *ummah*, Maududi sees the public sphere and political governance as an important part of perpetuating a community of believers on earth. Maududi states that he believes the closest English translation to *jihad* would be “to exert one’s utmost endeavor in promoting a cause”²¹. In this way, Maududi is trying to criticize looking at Islam as a religion like other world religions, and rather proposes that Islam be looked at as a religion that permeates the fields of politics, social life, and international relations, and is, for him, not just a private matter.

Maududi also touches on the importance of viewing Islam as a revolutionary ideology, rather than a religion in the traditional sense. This is a common theme that flows through all important scholarship in the post World War I and II phases of Islamist thought, and is also a persistent idea in 21st century Islamist thought. One can see this question and idea raised a

²⁰ Ibid., 5

²¹ Ibid., 5

great deal in the present day with ideas of Islamist parties, particularly after the Arab Spring. Organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Al Na'ada in Tunisia operate under similar beliefs, and therefore believe that Islam is important in all aspects of a society, including politics. Understanding Islam and political Islam outside of Western understandings of religious practice is crucial, and is also a prominent theme in the literature surrounding Islamism. One can see that the view of Islam as a religion that permeates the political and social realms of a society creates an idea in the Western imagination that displays Islam as intolerant in their approach to society. Particularly because in the Western mindset, religion and state operations must be separate, it is difficult for said mindset to see a society where these two things are combined. This leads to misunderstandings of the aims and objectives of many Islamist organizations. For example, Qutb sees *jihad* as both an offensive and a defensive mechanism. For many Westerners, this is considered dangerous and narrow-minded. However, as historical context suggests, such a statement does not mean that there should be constant attack on groups of people that are different from the Western world. Rather, if one understands this idea of *jihad* in the Islamic context, it is possible to see that such an idea of *jihad* relates to the historical context in

which Muslim ideas were being violently oppressed, and the community felt the need to assert itself.

Literature Review

Scholarship surrounding Islamism spans a wide array of interpretations of Islam as a tradition and a political ideology. Scholars of Islamism generally agree that Western notions of the term Islamism are both an oversimplification of the term, and, often, a complete misunderstanding of the purpose of Islamism. For this paper, it was important to examine key scholars in revisionist discourse on the subject of Islamism. This literature review supports the previously stated hypothesis through a critique of Western approaches to Islamist thought.

Malise Ruthven, a religious scholar at Oxford, argues “Muslim writers and ideologists described as ‘fundamentalist’ have all adopted some modernistic and allegorical interpretations of the Qur’an”²². Scholarship acknowledges the idea that fundamentalists cannot be viewed as fundamentalists simply because they wish to establish an Islamic state. Rather, Ruthven proposes that Islamism be understood as progressive within its own tradition. If one were to place Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and the Muslim Brotherhood into the context of Ruthven, Ruthven would understand the

²² Ruthven, *“Islam”*, 18

change over time of these organizations as an indication of their own modernization and progression within the tradition.

Samira Haj argues a similar point. She states, “I propose that we engage in a more subtle and nuanced discussion of different traditions, recognizing that Western liberal thought is...as much of a tradition as is Islamic thought”²³. For Haj, Western liberal thought accompanies the notion that in order for something to be modern, it must be secular. Because of the way in which Western society has developed, and the emphasis on separation of church and state, imposing a Western liberal framework on Islamic thought ensures that all Islamist thought can be read as “fundamentalist”. For Haj, Islam does represent modernity, but does so within its own context, rather than within the context of Western liberal framework. Islam is highlighted as a “discursive tradition”²⁴, one with constant re-evaluation. Islamism lives within Haj’s argument, and changes with Islamism.

Kurzman, another prominent scholar at Oxford, also discusses the many ways in which viewing an Islamist organization as “fundamentalist” is a label that can be misleading. Earlier discussion of Qutb highlights this idea. Qutb is often thought of as the pioneer of fundamentalist Islamist thought,

²³ Samira Haj, *“Reordering Islamic Orthodoxy”*, 335

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 338

however, as a close reading of Qutb proves, he is actually quite progressive in the realms of Islam, and takes many traditional ideas further. Kurzman examines Al-Qaeda in great depth, and the ways in which Al-Qaeda can be considered a modern Islamist organization.

With the many interactions that the Western world has had with Islamism, these definitions become much more blurred, and Islamism comes to contain many different revolutionary movements, political parties, and theories. As Kurzman argues, “Islamists, like almost all Muslims, regard the early years of Islam as the golden era, and they aspire to model their behavior after the Prophet Muhammad and his early followers...”²⁵ Thus, even as Islamism develops into modernity, it still, in most cases, wishes to emulate the early *ummah*—political community of the Prophet—in its political aims.

Kurzman compares and contrasts Islamist groups that embrace modernity and those who do not, and in doing so, touches on all three case studies covered in this paper. Kurzman argues that Islamist groups who embrace modernity do more for their organization’s longevity. This contrasts traditionalist movements who, “...are finding it increasingly difficult to survive in a competitive religious environment and occupy only isolated

²⁵ Charles Kurzman, *“Bin Laden and Other Thoroughly Modern Muslims”*, 13

pockets of Muslim society”²⁶. He also argues that modern Islamists have extremely modern goals, rather than the archaic goals the West often interprets.

“Islamist political platforms share significant planks with Western modernity. Islamists envision overturning tradition in politics, social relations, and...they favor egalitarian meritocracy, as opposed to inherited social hierarchies”²⁷

Kurzman sees the fundamental problem with Islamism moving forward as the ability to gain popular support. When Kurzman wrote in 2002, Islamism had not gained the political support throughout the Middle East, most notably in Tunisia and in Egypt, that it has in the past year. Kurzman states “Islamists thus face a dilemma that is common to other radical movements of the past century: whether to water down their message to attract popular support or maintain a pure vision”²⁸. With the increased support that can be seen now for Islamist groups, one must question which of these approaches Islamism has decided to take. It is also important to note the automatic assumption that Kurzman makes in assessing Islamism as radical. This paper will not function under such an assumption, but will assess whether or not such an assumption is warranted. When Kurzman references radical

²⁶ Ibid., 13

²⁷ Ibid., 16

²⁸ Ibid., 19

organizations that “water down their message”²⁹, he does not consider the possibility that some Islamist organizations may not have a need for this. This paper will show that there are many different ways that Islamism adapts itself to changing times in all of the case studies.

Mark Lynch, meanwhile, highlights the fundamental challenge within Islamism regarding modernity,

...the fierce war between the Salafi purists who call for a literalistic Islam insulated from modernity and the modernizing pragmatists who seek to adapt Islam to the modern world.³⁰

For Lynch, there are many ways that Islamism seeks to modernize itself, and embraces changing political and social climates. As this paper examines change over time, and the role such change plays in the ideological developments of Islamist organizations, it will become clear that there are many ways Islamist organizations embrace changing political and social times in their own way.

Because of the many ways that the literature expresses the differences between different sects of Islam, and therefore different Islamist traditions, it can indeed be argued that the portrayal of Islamism in American media images is extremely unrepresentative of the tradition. Because the literature highlights the problems with a Western analysis of Islam, and the ways that

²⁹ Ibid., 19

³⁰ Lynch, “*Veiled Truths*”

Islamism is constantly evolving in its own way, it is possible to understand the gross misinterpretations that American understandings of the Islamist tradition support.

Case Study 1: Al-Qaeda

Al-Qaeda was chosen as the first case study because of its role in bringing Islamism into the American public eye. After the Twin Towers fell in 2001, America was in complete uproar, and the public was bombarded with images of burning buildings, and tapes of Osama bin Laden expressing his disdain for American foreign politics. Examining Al-Qaeda without these pre-conceived ideas is difficult for many prominent intellectuals in the United States, another reason that choosing to examine ideological change over time removes one from these pre-conceived notions.

Al-Qaeda is very much a product of its time period, a multinational organization that has become increasingly globalized over time. Al-Qaeda's Islamist vision is not tied to one country, but rather, Al-Qaeda has policy prescriptions for the Muslim world as a whole. This is very linked to the idea of the *ummah*, and a single Arab community that must follow similar practices in accordance with the proof texts.

Al-Qaeda was a product of the *jihad* in Afghanistan and during the Soviet occupation of 1979-89. Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, the

primary founders of Al-Qaeda, were both in Afghanistan assisting the *mujahideen* against invading Soviet forces. Osama bin Laden recruited men to the cause in Afghanistan by recruiting young Arabs. As Lawrence Wright, a journalist and scholar of Al-Qaeda, examines the reasons for young Arabs to turn to martyrdom, he examines the political and social situations in the Arab world. "The lure of an illustrious and meaningful death was especially powerful in cases where the pleasures and rewards of life were crushed by government oppression and economic deprivation" ³¹ . The *jihad* in Afghanistan presented Arabs and Afghans alike with a unifying cause, and charismatic figures like Osama bin Laden drew upon the depravity of young Arabs to glorify the idea of martyrdom. "Martyrdom promised such young men an ideal alternative to a life that was so sparing in its rewards"³². Arabs rallied around the cause of expelling "...the infidel invader from a Muslim land" ³³ . It was within this political context that the multinational organization Al-Qaeda came to be. On this basis, Al-Qaeda was also able to establish itself as one of the few Islamist organizations of its time to have a truly global perspective on *jihad*. This served them in drawing followers, and also disseminating their message.

³¹ Lawrence B. Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, (New York: 2006), 123

³² Ibid., 123

³³ Ibid., 146

Though Zawahiri and bin Laden came from very different political goals and objectives in the *jihad* in Afghanistan, they also had a great deal in common when they came together to found Al-Qaeda in 1988. Both men were educated, “members of the educated and technological class, despite their fundamentalist religious views”³⁴. As Fawaz A. Gerges, a professor of Middle Eastern Studies and International Relations and the London School of Economics, describes, “Al-Qaeda was born out of a marriage of convenience between Zawahiri and powerful Egyptian contingent on the one hand...and bin Laden...on the other”³⁵. The profound influence of both Zawahiri and bin Laden represents the influence of two prominent intellectual traditions on Al-Qaeda. “Egyptian radical Islamism and Saudi ultra-conservatism.”³⁶ This highlights the breadth of religious influence that one can find even within Islam. The two different ideological traditions of Zawahiri and bin Laden combined to create an organization with an ideology very different from many other Islamist organizations. To bring this point back to the central question of whether or not Islamism can be contained inside one single definition, the intellectual traditions of Zawahiri and bin Laden further highlight the impossibility of a single categorization.

For Zawahiri, secular nationalism in Egypt fueled much of the doctor’s

³⁴ Ibid., 145

³⁵ Fawaz G. Gerges, *“The Rise and Fall of Al-Qaeda”*, (Oxford: 2011), 34

³⁶ Ibid., 34

interest in the Afghan *jihad*. For Zawahiri, “...only Qur’anic-based states would protect and promote Islam against the West’s corrupting influences and imperial crusades”³⁷. In the days prior to his alliance with bin Laden, Zawahiri had very little interest in pursuing transnational *jihad*, and rather focused on the problems within the Egyptian world. Zawahiri’s ideological roots were steeped in the ideas and teaching of Sayyid Qutb. Zawahiri “...sought to bring Qutb’s unfinished struggle to fruition and establish a Qur’anic-based state”³⁸. He began pursuing this cause in Egypt as a teenager, first developing an underground movement in Egypt against Nasser, and attempted to stage a military coup to facilitate change in the Egyptian state. Prior to his decision to embrace transnational *jihad*, Zawahiri was focused on overthrowing the secular leadership in Egypt, convinced of the detriment it posed to the development of a “proper” Islamic state. For Zawahiri, Afghanistan was a trial in assessing the possibility of developing an Islamic state in Egypt.

Bin Laden’s intellectual focus was very different than Zawahiri’s. Though bin Laden also drew much of his political base from the teachings of Qutb, the most influential figure in his intellectual development prior to meeting Zawahiri was a lecturer at King Abdul Aziz University, Abdullah

³⁷ Ibid., 35

³⁸ Ibid., 37

Azzam. Azzam, like Qutb, “...favored the formation of a ‘pioneering vanguard’ that would build an ideal Qur’anic society and bring about an Islamic revival worldwide.”³⁹. Azzam also stressed the importance of “...a homeland, as a base for Islam...”⁴⁰. One can see bin Laden internalize the importance of this in his quest for an Islamic state in Afghanistan. Azzam, like Qutb, did not wish for an international *jihad*, and rather, focused on the development of a solid base that would promote further development of a worldwide Islamic community. Bin Laden also believed in transnational Muslim community that could be free from the segregation of Muslims by sect or nationality.

Here, one can see differences between Al-Qaeda and both the Taliban, born after Al-Qaeda and the much older Muslim Brotherhood. Because the latter organizations are so focused around their own countries and establishing Islamic rule in their individual countries, they do not focus as much as Al-Qaeda does on the establishment of a homeland and base for Islam. For Al-Qaeda’s global vision of Islam, there must be one central base that governs the entire Islamic community. In contrast, both the Taliban and the Muslim Brotherhood believe that establishing more just Islamic rule in their individual countries is a more important focus.

An important intellectual staple of present day Al-Qaeda is hatred of

³⁹ Ibid., 41

⁴⁰ Ibid., 41

the United States and the broader West. Though this is an important aspect of Al-Qaeda's political aims today, this was not always the case, particularly immediately after the founding of the organization, though it was already globalist in scope. As Gerges specifies, even when the Afghan war ended in 1989, Al-Qaeda's rhetoric still did not focus on targeting the United States. This was partially due to US involvement in the war in Afghanistan, because much of the efforts of bin Laden's recruits were funded through the United States. Gerges traces the development of anti-American sentiment to the 1990-91 Gulf War. During the Gulf War, the United States positioned troops in Saudi Arabia, bin Laden's home country. "He viewed actions in the Gulf War and afterward as part of an American conspiracy to establish military bases and dominate Muslim lands..."⁴¹.

Both the Muslim Brotherhood and the Taliban take a similar approach, and both do so because of their relationship with Western powers in their own countries. As is later discussed, the Muslim Brotherhood is compelled to establish a more international political ideology as a result of the problems in Palestine during the 40's. The Taliban wishes to rid Afghanistan of all external powers, which focuses on the United States now. In both cases, these aims are reactionary, and respond to foreign influence in the Islamic world. Because the Western world is constantly involved in the

⁴¹ Ibid., 49

affairs of predominantly Islamic countries, hatred of the West is a prevalent theme in Islamist organizations.

In a letter written to the Americans in 2002, Osama bin Laden explains his hatred towards the United States, and reasons for the ongoing fight against them. He argues that Al-Qaeda opposes and continues to fight America because “...you attacked us and continue to attack us”⁴². In this accusation, bin Laden focuses a great deal on US support for Israel, and against the Palestinian cause. “The blood pouring out of Palestine must be equally avenged. You must know that the Palestinians do not cry alone...”⁴³ He also states, “You attacked us in Somalia; you supported the Russian atrocities against us in Chechnya, the Indian oppression against us in Kashmir...”⁴⁴ It is important to remember that when bin Laden says “we”, he is referring to the Islamic *ummah* in general, and it is part of bin Laden’s agenda to establish his legitimacy. He hopes to be recognized as speaking on behalf of the entire *ummah*, but, it is important to remember that he represents only part of the *ummah* in these claims. Bin Laden goes on to specify what he believes the *ummah* should desire from the United States to right the perceived wrongs against the *ummah*. “Do not expect anything from

⁴² Raymond Ibrahim, “*The Al-Qaeda Reader*”, (New York: 2007), 178

⁴³ Ibid., 178

⁴⁴ Ibid., 178

us except *jihad*, resistance, and revenge”⁴⁵. For bin Laden, such retribution stems from repeated US attacks on the *ummah*. “It is commanded by our religion and intellect that the oppressed have a right to return the aggression.”⁴⁶ Bin Laden therefore sees Palestinian acts of violence and acts of violence throughout the Muslim community as justification for aggression towards the United States. The United States is a symbol of the West, and even disdain for other Western powers, such as Israeli occupation of Palestine, are still equated with the United States. Bin Laden justifies attacks against civilians, such as the 9/11, by arguing that, “The American people are the ones who choose their government by way of their own free will [through democratic elections].”⁴⁷ Therefore, bin Laden believes all citizens of the United States should be held responsible for their Presidents offenses because of the specifics of the democratic system.

This is somewhat different than the way in which the Muslim Brotherhood and the Taliban view Westerners and the Western democratic system in general. Today, the Muslim Brotherhood embraces the democratic system, and therefore does not have the same animosity towards democracy that Al-Qaeda demonstrates. The Taliban exhibits a similar disdain towards Westerners, and showed they felt the 9/11 attacks were somewhat justified

⁴⁵ Ibid., 179

⁴⁶ Ibid, 179

⁴⁷ Ibid, 181

in their harboring of Osama bin Laden. Though the Muslim Brotherhood and the Taliban display disdain towards the way of life of many Westerners, Al-Qaeda is unique in their desire to seek out this way of life and systematically attack it.

Though attacks on the West began with the idea of *jalahiliyya* Sayyid Qutb first outlines, attacks on the United States, and an international *jiḥād* are staple intellectual aims of Al-Qaeda, rather than any intellectual founder of political Islam. “While Qutb’s diatribe against America has widely resonated among Islamists, Al-Qaeda’s actions cannot be traced to his rhetoric”⁴⁸ Western involvement in the politics of the Middle East sparks both bin Laden and Zawahiri to specifically target the United States in their international *jiḥād*ist aims.

Al-Qaeda, unlike the Muslim Brotherhood, does not see democracy as a way to promote an Islamic state. In Zawahiri’s book *Bitter Harvest: The [Muslim] Brotherhood in Sixty Years*, he argues that, “...democracy and Islam are antithetical and thus can never coexist”⁴⁹. In the eyes of Zawahiri, the “true cause of Islam...is, enforcing Allah’s rule here on earth by any direct means, preferably *jiḥād*, not passive roundabout ways, such as elections”⁵⁰. Zawahiri goes on to state “The legislator in democracies is the people, and

⁴⁸ Gerges, “*The Rise and Fall of Al-Qaeda*”, 33

⁴⁹ Ibrahim, “*The Al-Qaeda Reader*”, 118

⁵⁰ Ibid., 118

the Legislator in monotheocracies is Allah, the Glorious and Most High. Thus, democracy is a partnership with Allah”⁵¹. Zawahiri is therefore arguing that because democracy puts the right to govern in the hands of the people, rather than in the hands of God and Sharia’, it is considered blasphemous. The Taliban also does not embrace democracy in the same way that the Muslim Brotherhood does, but rather, promotes a more tribal approach to leadership. This is largely influenced by their tribal experiences in Afghanistan.

If Al-Qaeda rejects democracy, one must question the kind of world system that Al-Qaeda envisions, and what kind of governance they do propose. In his attack of the Muslim Brotherhood’s desire for secular democracy in Egypt, Zawahiri demonstrates that he advocates for a “monotheocracy”⁵². Zawahiri argues “The difference between democracy and monotheocracy (*tawhid*) is that monotheocracy makes Allah the sole legislator while democracy is the rule of the people...”⁵³. Therefore, Al-Qaeda promotes monotheocracy, and a world system in which Allah is trusted as the primary legislator. This therefore goes to show that Al-Qaeda believes Islamic law is an important part of governance. “The Book [Koran] and the *sunna*, and the sayings of the *ulema*...all clearly demonstrate that exchanging

⁵¹ Ibid., 122

⁵² Ibid., 122

⁵³ Ibid., 122

the Islamic *sharia* with something else is infidelity”⁵⁴. Therefore, Al-Qaeda also promotes the use of *sharia* in governance, rather than any other form of legislation.

It is interesting to note, however, the approach to family life and women that many members of Al-Qaeda take. After the initial founding of Al-Qaeda, when bin Laden resided in the Sudan in the years 1993-5, it is interesting to examine the lives of his wives. Bin Laden supported his wives’ continued career ambitions. His wife Umm Hamza remained a professor of child psychology, and another of his wives, Umm Khaled, taught Arabic grammar. Both women were able to continue their jobs by commuting to Saudi Arabia during bin Laden’s stay in Sudan. This highlights the ways in which Al-Qaeda is extremely modern, while also retaining ideals of fundamental Islam, and further demonstrates the idea that political Islam represents modernity within the tradition of Islam itself.

What is particularly important about Al-Qaeda when assessing them in the context of other Islamist movements is the emphasis placed on this as a transnational movement, and montheocratic governance on an international scale. Though Al-Qaeda’s founding grew from the war in Afghanistan, the aims of the organization have always been geared towards an international solution to governance. Al-Qaeda’s rhetoric never focuses on

⁵⁴ Ibid., 122

the system in a single country, and only does so when criticizing foreign policy decisions of other countries—for example, the earlier critique of US action in Palestine.

International jihad lies at the core of Al-Qaeda's intellectual and political aims. This is at the core of Al-Qaeda's world view, and is something that follows the organization from its beginning to present day. For Al-Qaeda, the *umma* must constantly be striving to right all wrongs against the previously outlined monotheocracy. "Thus, we wrote these pages as a caution and warning to our Muslim *umma* in its sacred awakening and victorious *jihad*...to vanquish the American-Jewish Crusading campaign"⁵⁵. This call for the Muslim community to seek out governance that does not take Allah into account shows that Al-Qaeda makes *jihad* a priority in their political aims.

When one examines these views in the context of the recent Arab Awakening, or alongside the Western view of Al-Qaeda's mission, the aforementioned ideas are important. One could even argue statements like the previous are aimed specifically at Western countries. When understanding these views in the Western context, it is important to understand the lack of division between politics and religion in the Muslim mindset. For Al-Qaeda, and many other Islamist organizations, it is important

⁵⁵ Ibid., 81

for their own eternal salvation, and that of the *ummah* to ensure that *Allah's* community on earth is as much to his liking as possible.

However, in discussing Al-Qaeda's political aims, it is important to remember the different organizations and ideological Islamist traditions encompasses. From Al-Qaeda's inception to present day, Al-Qaeda has brought a number of organizations under its wing that don't necessarily align perfectly with their own political and ideological aims. Wright explains that after Al-Qaeda's inception, "bin Laden lured various nationalist groups under his umbrella by offering weapons and training...Bin Laden also provided seed money for revolution"⁵⁶. Wright also states "...in the early nineties, bin Laden was still refining the concept of al-Qaeda. It was only one of his many enterprises, but it offered him a potentially extraordinary base of power"⁵⁷.

This quote, and description of al-Qaeda as an enterprise is an excellent example of the many modern aspects of al-Qaeda as an Islamist organization. Affiliations with other organizations, and decisions to support certain regimes and revolutions through the Arab world are made, it would seem, based on opportunities to expand both the power and scope of al-Qaeda as an organization. Al-Qaeda has attempted to acknowledge its own mistakes in recent years, in an attempt to ensure that its support continues and grows.

⁵⁶ Wright, *"The Looming Tower"*, 215

⁵⁷ Ibid., 218

Zawahiri states in 2008 “I neither condone the killing of innocent people nor claim that jihad is free of error. Muslim leaders during the time of the Prophet made mistakes, but the jihad goes on...”⁵⁸.

As al-Qaeda’s supporters become more diverse, al-Qaeda begins to face problems in establishing a cohesive Islamist vision, and its intellectual aims become extremely fractured. Gerges argues in *The Rise and Fall of Al-Qaeda* that the organization is in a state of decline. This supposes that the primary goal of al-Qaeda was to develop a cohesive support base under similar ideological ideas. However, it could also be argued that al-Qaeda’s goal was rather to expand its own power in the Islamic world. Though after their stay in Afghanistan, this power began to decline, attempted involvement in the revolts in Syria and Libya could expand the power that al-Qaeda has in the region.

Case Study 2: The Taliban

This was chosen as the second case study because of its relationship to Al-Qaeda, and the media attention it received after the 2001 invasion. This case study will examine the Islamist policies of the Taliban from its inception and governance in Afghanistan, and then examine the ways in which their Islamist policies change following their defeat in 2001. The histories surrounding both of these times shapes a great deal of the changes in the

⁵⁸ Gerges, *“The Rise and Fall of al-Qaeda”*, 123

Taliban's ideology. When the Taliban is discussed in the modern American media, they are often portrayed as parochial, and unwilling to embrace modernity. What this case study will show, particularly when one takes into account the Taliban's change following 2001, is the ways the movement has adapted to more modern times, and been able to change to accommodate such times.

It is imperative to look at the inception of the Taliban in Kandahar in 1994 during the mujahedeen era. During this chaotic political time in Afghanistan, the Taliban emerges as an extremely popular grassroots movement. This case study assesses the ways in which they became popular to the public through their appeal to religious governance, and the notion that they were a "movement for cleansing society rather than a party trying to grab power"⁵⁹. It then focuses on the religious politics of the Taliban during their occupation of Kabul. Finally, this case study examines the ways in which the 2001 US invasion, and subsequent overthrow of the Taliban, and how the new Taliban insurgency uses religious rhetoric for political gain. These different time periods will highlight the ideological changes the Taliban has undergone.

⁵⁹ Rashid, Ahmed. *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*. 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.

The Taliban first entered the Afghan political scene in 1994, and they did so from Kandahar. The majority of the Taliban were students in Pakistan and Southern Afghanistan, at religious schools, or *madrassas*. Taliban is derived from *Talib*, which means student. In the *madrasses*, they received a strict religious education. At the same time, they were also exposed to the chaotic political climate of the Mujahadeen era in Afghanistan. In the *madrassas*, the young men who would become the Taliban learned about the original Islamic *ummah*, and came to believe that such religious order should be established in Afghanistan because of the chaos that enveloped the country then. The young men that would become the Taliban studying in the madrasas in Pakistan were closely tied to Pakistani political parties, and the mix between religious learning and the political ties established with Pakistani political parties breeds the views of political Islam that the Taliban mold with relation to the political situation in Afghanistan. Initially, their goal was somewhat simple: “ending the disorder while also reforming Afghanistan’s religious and cultural practices by creating a pure Islamic state along Salafist lines”⁶⁰. “Restoring” a pure Islamic state is particularly important to the Taliban, and resonated with the people of Afghanistan because of the lack of religion under communist governance. Much of their

⁶⁰ Barfield, Thomas. *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010.

funding and support came from Pakistan, and therefore, Pakistani officials also controlled much of the Taliban's political message in the early stages. Rashid argues "Formal communications to foreign embassies in Islamabad were frequently dictated by Pakistani advisors"⁶¹.

In de-bunking common media images of the Taliban, the understanding that the Taliban was comprised of mainly young students starkly contrasts the general understanding most Americans have of the Taliban. As discussed previously, the organization's name is based on the importance of students to the movement. When discussing common media images of the Taliban, this view is particularly interesting because so often, the American media portrays important Taliban officials as parochial, older individuals. One can also draw comparisons here to Al-Qaeda. Young men were important to the mission of Al-Qaeda because, for Al-Qaeda, young men offered the most promising prospects for martyrdom. In 1998, it was written "After age twenty-five... people enter into family commitments; they graduate from college and commit themselves to work, in order to support their wives and children"⁶². Though Taliban officials never explicitly argue similar reasons for choosing young men, young men provided the basis of the Taliban's support and army in their early stages. This, again, demonstrates

⁶¹ Ahmed Rashid, *"Taliban"*, 24

⁶² Ibrahim, *"The Al-Qaeda Reader"*, 239

ways that Islamism is incorrectly represented in common media images. Very rarely are young men the face of Islamism to the American, or any other Western public.

The links between the *madrassas* and the Taliban's inception, the teachings of Islam, and the prophet Muhammad are extremely important in the development of the Taliban's initial ideology. Historian Seth Jones asserts that "The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the subsequent *jihad* against Soviet forces, was critical to the radicalization of Deobandi and other militant groups"⁶³. Jones therefore argues that the Soviet invasion and subsequent occupation of Afghanistan fueled the desire of many militant groups in Pakistan and in the Arab world to invest in the jihadist ideas already being perpetrated in the *madrassas*. Additionally, within Afghanistan, removing Russian and communist influence was also described as a jihad: "By framing the conflict as a jihad, it was possible to unite a large number of people and deprive the Kabul government of legitimacy"⁶⁴.

The Taliban also saw this as a *jihad*, and wanted to restore legitimacy to Afghanistan's system of governance. It is also important to note that as the Taliban is establishing in Pakistan, Al-Qaeda is also establishing itself under similar ideas of jihad in Afghanistan. *Jihad* is a central concept to both Al-

⁶³ Jones, Seth G. *In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan*. New York: W.W Norton and Company, 2009

⁶⁴ Barfield, "*Afghanistan*", 242

Qaeda and the Taliban, and yet, both organizations use *jihad* in different ways. Though the *jihad* in Afghanistan was the initial focus for Al-Qaeda, the importance quickly became the global *jihad*. In contrast, the Taliban continuously focuses on Afghanistan, like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt does with Egyptian politics.

In examining the stark differences within Islamism, it is also valuable to compare the differing reactions of the Taliban and the Muslim Brotherhood to perceived failure of Islamic rule in both their countries. For the Taliban, this becomes a problem solved by *jihad* almost immediately, and the Taliban chooses to fight against the current regime. In contrast, the Muslim Brotherhood chooses to attempt to establish a relationship with the government in hopes that this will lead to a more prominent role of Islam in the public sphere. The Taliban's desire to overthrow the mujahedeen, and establish renewed Islamic order perhaps stems from the chaos in Afghanistan in the early 90's, and before. Though the Brotherhood was created during a tumultuous time in Egyptian history, there was not the same anarchy that there was in Afghanistan under the mujahedeen.

Early leadership plays a role in the ideological development of the Taliban. Mullah Omar, it is argued, was given a sort of a divine status because of his perceived devotion to the Islamic faith. "Some Taliban say Omar was

chosen as their leader not for his political or military ability, but for his piety and his unswerving belief in Islam. Others say he was chosen by God”⁶⁵. Mullah Omar uses these ideas to his advantage when the Taliban attempts to take power in Kabul through heavy use of religious ideology in order to solidify his legitimacy as the leader of what could, in its initial stages, be seen as a movement of young Islamic scholars and jihadists. “In order to establish his ideological credentials and attract new recruits, Mullah Omar turned to the legend of the Prophet Muhammad’s cloak”⁶⁶. Mullah Omar managed to create such a following around his leadership that his decisions were seldom questioned. The use of Muhammad’s cloak is also an important symbol in understanding Mullah Omar’s political aims with regard to Islam. The act of dressing himself in the cloak of the Prophet and the comparison it drew between Mullah Omar and the Prophet indicate that the Taliban wished to establish a Qur’anic state that existed during Muhammad’s life.

Direct comparisons between an organizational leader and the Prophet are rare in the organizations discussed in this paper’s case studies. Though organizational leaders are often elevated to a higher, and almost spiritual status, particularly in the cases of Al-Qaeda’s Osama bin Laden and the Muslim Brotherhood’s Hasan al-Banna, there is very little direct comparison

⁶⁵ Amhed Rashid. *Taliban*. 23

⁶⁶ Jones, Seth G. *In the Graveyard*. 56

between these men and the Prophet himself. This highlights the use of convincing rhetoric, and ideas about the *ummah* of the Prophet that rallied the people of Afghanistan around the Taliban. There are direct similarities between the cult of personality created around Mullah Omar and that of Osama bin Laden. Bin Laden was strong because of his charisma, Mullah Omar because of his piety, and these characteristics greatly ameliorated their abilities to rally their followers around the cause.

Because of the aforementioned propaganda and the Taliban's ability to market themselves as an organization that would restore peace and order in an Afghanistan that was plagued by disorder and war, they gained quick popularity in their initial takeover. When we compare this with the Taliban we know today, even when one understands the many changes that the organization has gone through as a result of its 2001 ousting from Afghanistan, the basics of its mission remain relatively static. Particularly with the lack of political Islam present in the current administration, the Taliban today still insists on this mission.

Though their primary aim was to restore religious order and govern under the specifications of Islam, the Taliban did something very different in practice. In an attempt to establish a legal system on the basis of Sharia', and in an attempt to enforce this law, the Taliban enforced "Traditionally Islam in

Afghanistan has been immensely tolerant-to other Muslim sects, other religions and modern lifestyles”⁶⁷. In the view of Ahmed Rashid, a Pakistani journalist, the Taliban’s legal policies therefore represent a break from the ways in which Sharia was used in law prior to the Taliban’s rule. Sharia law was used as the prominent legal system of Afghanistan until 1925⁶⁸. The Taliban wished to ensure that order was quickly established, and, one could see the chaos created by the presence of different Muslim sects in the mujahedeen era as a factor in their extremely harsh stance towards other Muslim sects, religions, and lifestyles.

The backgrounds of prominent Taliban leaders also provides some explanation for their harsh legal codes. Rashid argues “The Taliban leaders were all from the poorest, most conservative, least literate southern Pashtun provinces of Afghanistan. In Mullah Omar’s village women had always gone around fully veiled and no girl had ever gone to school because there were none.”⁶⁹ Rashid is therefore arguing that the socioeconomic status of the Taliban informed their beliefs on conservative practice, such as women attending school. He also argues “Their recruits-the orphans, the rootless, the lumpen proletariat from the war and the refugee camps-had been brought up

⁶⁷ Ahmed Rashid. *Taliban*. 82

⁶⁸ Ibid. 83

⁶⁹ Ibid. 110

in a totally male society.”⁷⁰ When the Taliban was first introduced to the American media in 2001, their harsh treatment of women was the target of a great deal of media attention. As Rashid discusses, however, this was more a product of socioeconomic status than something that permeates the general ideology of the Taliban. Because the American media has put so much focus on the Taliban, they also imply that this is the norm for Islamist organizations. As has been previously established, the harsh legal codes of the Taliban do not represent the norm.

Jones argues, “While it was a detestable regime that committed gross human-rights violations, the Taliban was successful in establishing law and order throughout most of Afghanistan.”⁷¹ The key element that Jones argues established the Taliban’s legitimacy was their ability to keep their people safe. For Jones, the fall of the Taliban in 2001 had absolutely no bearing on their control of the country. For one in Afghanistan’s history, Jones states “There was no Pashtun opposition”⁷². Rather, for Jones, the fall of the Taliban was concerned only with the alliance Mullah Omar struck with Al-Qaeda. “Mullah Omar had been willing to shy away from a relationship with bin Laden, the United States might have left the Taliban alone. Instead,

⁷⁰ Ibid. 111

⁷¹ Jones, Seth G. *In the Graveyard*. 78

⁷² Ibid. 79

Afghanistan became a nexus for the Taliban's radical Deobandism and al Qa'ida's global jihad."⁷³.

In 2001, the Taliban was removed from power during the US invasion following the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The Taliban fled, mostly to Pakistan, and began to reform themselves into the insurgent movement that plagues US forces in Afghanistan and the Pakistani people today. With this reorganization came ideological change. In his book "Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan", journalist Antonio Giustozzi argues when discussing the reasons for a reorganization of the Taliban into an insurgency movement "It is most likely that for 'ideological' reasons they just never accepted defeat and thought it was their duty to fight on."⁷⁴. Giustozzi also argues that this ideology he mentions is largely reflective of the Taliban's old ideology "This 'ideology' could be described as a mix of the most conservative village Islam with Deobandi doctrines, with a stress on the importance of ritual modes of behavior"⁷⁵.

The "Neo-Taliban's" ideology had adapted from the old Taliban in a number of ways: "They seem to have absorbed from their foreign jihadists a more flexible and less orthodox attitude towards imported technologies and

⁷³ Ibid. 79

⁷⁴ Giustozzi, Antonio. *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan*. New York: Columbia University, 2008. 11

⁷⁵ Ibid. 12

techniques”⁷⁶. He also argues that “the Neo-Taliban became much more integrated in the international jihadist movement after 2001...Their rhetoric featured concepts such as ‘global Christian war against Islam’”⁷⁷. Giustozzi argues that because the Neo-Taliban becomes more integrated into the international system through the international jihadist movement. This has a huge effect on the Taliban’s religious ideology, because, as Giustozzi previously argues, their focus on ritual which stemmed from village practices informed much of the Taliban’s strict ideology until 2002 when the insurgency re-organized itself. “Politics, in the realm of the ‘old Taliban’, was reduced to the demand of an orthodox application of the Shariah, based on a rigid interpretation of the Sunna”⁷⁸.

Their integration into an international system and embrace of technology draws some comparisons to Al-Qaeda. As previously stated, Al-Qaeda is extremely modern in the way that they embrace an international system, and see *jihad* as an international problem. Though the Taliban still focuses on Afghanistan in their jihadist ideas, they have embraced the international system to various degrees as they search for funding and support. Funding comes from all over the Islamic world, and this does not

⁷⁶ Ibid. 13

⁷⁷ Ibid. 13

⁷⁸ Ibid. 12

ideologically trouble them. Much like the Muslim Brotherhood, the Taliban wishes to rally the Islamic world to assist in ensuring that their country is governed in Islamic terms.

The vision of the “Neo-Taliban” is extremely different from the organization that governed Afghanistan until 2001. The organization has undergone tremendous change to ensure they are viable in the current world. In an article in The New Yorker detailing the Obama administration’s relationship with the current Taliban. Steve Coll argues,

“The Taliban today are diverse and fractured. Some old-school leaders, who served in Mullah Omar’s cabinet or as governors during the nineteen-nineties, belong to a council known as the Quetta Shura, named for the Pakistani city in which many Taliban have enjoyed sanctuary since 2001. This is the group whose members are thought to be most ready to consider coming in from the cold. Other factions, such as the Haqqani network, based in North Waziristan, which has long-standing ties to the I.S.I., are regarded as more malicious and more susceptible to Pakistan’s control. Inside Afghanistan, young Taliban commanders fight locally and often viciously, oblivious of international diplomacy. Yalta this is not.”⁷⁹

This quote demonstrates that the United States must engage the Taliban in order to further her own interests in Afghanistan. Additionally, the “Neo-Taliban” is a Taliban that is not discussed in American popular media. Rather,

⁷⁹ Coll, Steve. "The Obama Administration and the Taliban." *the New Yorker* (2011)
http://www.newyorker.com/talk/comment/2011/02/28/110228taco_talk_coll.

when one thinks “Taliban”, it is still equated to old men in Afghanistan and women in burquas. Their developments throughout the 21st century support the hypothesis in arguing that there cannot be one definition of Islamism, and also show that Islamism is a tradition that is constantly changing, even within its organizations.

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt

International politics understands the Muslim Brotherhood as an organization that has embraced democracy as a means of achieving political power, and disseminating ideas of political Islam. Particularly in light of the recent uprising in Egypt and approaching parliamentary elections, the Muslim Brotherhood has been subject to increased international attention in the past two years. The Muslim Brotherhood is often touted to be one of the most influential organizations in the Middle East. The Brotherhood is currently listed as the second biggest charitable organization worldwide, behind the Catholic Church. For the purpose of this case study, the focus will be the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and not on other branches in North Africa, Yemen, or elsewhere.

The Muslim Brotherhood has changed dramatically as an organization over time. What began as an underground militant movement in the 1920's transformed into a non-violent political movement wishing to embrace a

democratic system as a means of growing political power. This decision is somewhat controversial with regard to other Islamist movements. Zawahiri himself took issue with the Muslim Brotherhood back in the 1980's. Assessing this in light of the central research question shows that previous notions in popular American media of Islamism applies very little to the Muslim Brotherhood currently. The possibility that of an Islamist organization that embraces democracy, and democratic processes is largely unheard of in American media portrayals of any Islamist organizations, and particularly the Muslim Brotherhood. As this case study assesses the desire of the Brotherhood to involve themselves in the democratic system, the main research question and hypothesis will need to be re-visited in light of this. As was discussed in more depth in the Al-Qaeda case study, Zawahiri takes particular issue with this stance. In order to understand the intellectual development of the Muslim Brotherhood over time, one must begin with its founding.

Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the Brotherhood, is perhaps the most influential figure in the intellectual roots of the Brotherhood. Hasan al-Banna was well educated in his small hometown of Mahmudiyya, where he was learned in both "...classical Islamic learning and the emotional discipline of

Sufism”⁸⁰. When Banna arrived in Cairo in the 1920’s, he found much to be desired in the people of Cairo’s integration of religion in their everyday lives. In the 1920’s, religion was not playing the prominent role that Banna envisioned it would in the public sphere, and as Egypt began to imagine itself as an independent nation, many different political parties emerged, none of which proposed the Islamic state that Banna and many of his followers envisioned. Richard Mitchell, an associate professor of Near Eastern History at the University of Michigan, highlights this struggle by summarizing what Banna saw as some of the serious problems with Egyptian spiritual and political life

...the post-war ‘orientations to apostasy and on tradition and orthodoxy...the books, newspapers, and magazines, which propagated those ideas whose sole goal was ‘the weakening influence of religion’⁸¹.

Banna would soon discover he was not alone in his discontent. He joined another religious group in his early years in Cairo, the Islamic Society for Nobility and Character. Banna also found himself amongst a group of individuals that felt the anxiety that Banna did over the state of Egypt. “No one but God knows how many nights we spent reviewing the state of the

⁸⁰ Richard Mitchell, *“Society of Muslim Brothers”*, (Oxford: 1969), 3

⁸¹ Ibid, 4

nation...analyzing the sickness, thinking of the possible remedies..."⁸². In his years before the creation of the Brotherhood, Banna was a strong supporter of a variety of other Islamic organizations, the like Young Men's Muslim Association, and the *Majallat al-Fath*, which represented a grouping of conservative Muslim organizations. Banna was compelled to begin his own organization to right the many wrongs he was in Egypt through a conviction that other religious groups did not address the breadth and depth of issues that would bring "faith to the people"⁸³.

Banna sought out religious scholars and elders in Cairo, and began to grow his own group of followers. The Brotherhood was founded in 1928, and grew from a small group of followers that Banna developed through his work in Isma'iliyya, a small town near the Suez Canal. Banna's leadership was integral to the Brotherhood, and it was his vision for addressing the religious problems in Egypt and bringing Islamic faith back to the people that held the Brotherhood together. The Brotherhood stayed in Isma'iiyya to grow its membership, but shortly moved back to Cairo, and began to hold conferences. The purpose of these conferences were both to discuss and plan action, and ratify material that had been previously decided on. At its fifth conference, the intellectual aims of the Brotherhood were firmly solidified.

⁸² Ibid, 5

⁸³ Ibid, 5

These were identified as

“...the insistence on (1) Islam as a total system, complete unto itself, and the final arbiter of life in all its categories; (2) an Islam formulated from and based on its two primary sources, the revelation in the Qur’an and the wisdom of the Prophet in the Sunna; and (3) an Islam applicable to all times and places”⁸⁴

These aims appear very similar to many Islamist organizations. First, the definition of Islam as a “total system” is one that we see repeated in many Islamist intellectuals and organizations. Referring back to Maududi, and his argument that “revolutionary ideology and programme which seeks to alter the social order of the world and rebuild it in conformity with its own tenets and ideals.”⁸⁵, one can see similarity between the Muslim Brotherhood’s idea of a “total system”, and Maududi’s assertion of Islam as a “revolutionary ideology”. This idea of a “total system” also resonates with Al-Qaeda, particularly when transnational *jihad* becomes an intrinsic part of their ideological aims.

These aims also influenced the future development of Sayyid Qutb, an early member of the Brotherhood himself. These initial broad aims of the Muslim Brotherhood will remain the same, however, one will see the intrinsic effects of the political and social climate in Egypt, and how this political and social climate informs the approach to politics of the

⁸⁴ Ibid, 14

⁸⁵ Abul A’la Maududi, *Jihad in Islam*, 5

Brotherhood.

The Muslim Brotherhood aimed, in its initial founding, to address the spiritual climate of Egypt, rather than the political climate. This decision was primarily a result of Banna's focus on spiritual life. However, as a reaction to the "...socio-economic crisis and the continued spread of secularism..."⁸⁶, the Brotherhood became more involved in Egyptian politics as the 1930's wore on. Another factor in the Brotherhood's increased approach in politics was colonial influence in the Middle East. The Palestinian crisis became a huge source of discontent for the Brotherhood, and became known as the "external political struggle"⁸⁷. Here, one can see similarities between the Brotherhood and Al-Qaeda in their reactions to perceived attacks on the Muslim world elsewhere. The struggle in Palestine has been an important vector for Al-Qaeda's hatred of the United States.

Al Banna in particular became an extremely important political figure. "Al Banna's political activism became evident; for example, on a number of occasions he cooperated with Ismail Siddiqi, the Prime Minister, on the state of affairs inside Egypt..."⁸⁸. This involvement in state affairs represents a shift in culture from the previous approach that the Brotherhood took in building

⁸⁶ Mohammed Zahid, *"The Muslim Brotherhood and Egypt's Succession Crisis"*, (New York: 2010), 74

⁸⁷ Ibid, 74

⁸⁸ Ibid, 74

an Egypt, and broader Islamic community that conformed to the proof texts. The intellectual aims discussed in the previous paragraph did not have explicit mention of involvement in the Egyptian political process. Here, one can also draw similarities between the Brotherhood and the Taliban, as both organizations are involved in political processes of their governments. Though this is just through cooperation with the government in the case of the Muslim Brotherhood, government interaction is recognized as an important vehicle to ensure that Egypt's spiritual character was developed to Banna's liking. The Taliban also recognize government interaction and political power as an important part of implementing their ideology, hence their desire to take power in Kabul in 1996.

The Brotherhood approached crisis when the government called for the dissolution of the organization in 1948, caused by a period of marked instability between the government and the Brotherhood. Banna wished to merge the Brotherhood with the Muslim Youth Association, and submitted a proposal to turn the Brotherhood into a religious group to King Farouq. Banna argued that the Brotherhood would be "a religious group which would help the monarchy resist communism..."⁸⁹. The monarchy rejected this proposal, causing a split between the Brotherhood and the government. This caused internal disdain towards the monarchy, and eventually lead to Prime

⁸⁹ Ibid, 76

Minister Naqrashi's assassination by a member of the Brotherhood⁹⁰. The Brotherhood's involvement in uprisings and unrest during World War II drew attention to them, and the government subsequently attacked the Muslim Brotherhood. Additionally, in 1947, the Brotherhood was marked by a number of internal schisms. Namely, Banna had disputes with his deputy over constitutional specifics of the Brotherhood, and there were also questions over the morality of the general secretary⁹¹. The internal struggle of the Brotherhood combined with external pressures to test the organization. Because of the negative attention the Brotherhood received throughout Egypt during this time, Banna was murdered.

In this early period of the Brotherhood, some violence and what might be considered terrorist acts occurred. Under Banna, a Secret Unit was established. Though it is difficult to ascertain exactly what the unit was involved in, Banna's argument was that "...the paramilitary group was merely preparing for combat in Palestine..."⁹². This draws similarities between the early Brotherhood and both the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, because Al-Qaeda also claimed they were preparing the many men they trained in combat in the early stages for the *jihad* in Afghanistan. It is interesting to note that,

⁹⁰ Ibid, 76

⁹¹ Mitchell, "*Society of Muslim Brothers*", 52

⁹² Barbara Zollner, "*The Muslim Brotherhood: Hasan al-Hudaybi and Ideology*", (London: 2008), 14

however, that violence within the organization was confined to a small group, and the actions of said group were kept secret from even organizational members. This perhaps demonstrates that the Brotherhood did not want to be seen as a violent organization, perhaps because of concerns of legitimacy, particularly because during this time, the Brotherhood wished to be considered a legitimate political organization in Egypt. This desire was driven by the next leader, Hassan Hudaybi, because he wanted the Brotherhood to “adopt a more professional outlook.”⁹³

Though a Secret Unit developed under Banna, there was very little *jihadist* discourse in the early Brotherhood. As previously discussed, the focus was more on improving the spiritual life in Egypt, and promoting governance that is more centered around Islam. When examining both the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, ideas of *jihad* and violence are inherent specificities of the organization’s core aims and actions. For both the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, *jihad*, and specifically, *jihad* in Afghanistan are important parts of their founding and development. Therefore, Al-Qaeda’s readings of Qutb are motivated by ideas of *jihad*. In contrast, the Brotherhood does not focus on a *jihad* in Egypt, because many Egyptians are already believers. The Brotherhood rather focuses on renewing their faith and piety, and promoting Islam in governance. To bring this back to the larger project, and research

⁹³ Mohammad Zahid, “*Egypt’s Succession Crisis*”, 76

question, the fact that one Islamist scholar can become the basis for violence and non-violence simultaneously demonstrates the breadth of interpretation within the tradition of Islamism. This further supports the idea that Islamism cannot be siphoned into one category.

The Brotherhood's next leader, Hassan Hudaybi, marked some serious changes in the Brotherhood's approach to politics, and one can see a turn away from these violent tendencies. One of al-Hudaybi's first acts as the new *Murshid* was to dissolve the Secret Unit. Al-Hudaybi was extremely intent on this, and even announced his intent to resign when the unit had not been dissolved 4 months after he assumed leadership⁹⁴. Al-Hudaybi is influential in the Brotherhood's tendencies towards non-violence, and sets up the structure of the Brotherhood that will carry through to the Brotherhood's modern Egyptian history.

Another important ideological shifts that came with Hudaybi's leadership was the shift from political discourse centered around the ideas of Banna, and political discourse centered instead around the ideas of Sayyid Qutb. Qutb began writing in the 1950s, as discussed previously, and his concepts of *jahiliyya* and *haq* ('truth') vs. *batil* ('falsity'). Though the older leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood rejected such concepts, Qutb had a great deal of influence, particularly on Hudaybi. Because Hudaybi was

⁹⁴ Ibid, 23

passionate about establishing a non-violent movement that could gain political legitimacy, he read Qutb from this perspective. In establishing *haq*, and removing *batil*, Hedaybi believed that preaching, and using methods that did not end in violence would be important in establishing the Brotherhood's legitimacy.

Hedaybi wrote *Du'at la Qudat* (Preachers not Judges) shortly after he became the *Murshid*, and was hugely influential in defining the ideological ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood under his leadership and following. It was also an instance in which there was a "...negative response from a fellow proponent of Islamism to Qutb's conception of Islam"⁹⁵. Though historians studying this period of the Brotherhood's development focus a great deal on Qutb's writings, *Du'at la Qudat* was also hugely influential. The work "combines spiritual instruction with Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*)"⁹⁶. In the work, there is an attempt to define the difference between *kufir* (unbelievers) and Muslims. In this sense, *kufir* are individuals who believes "...there is no God, and He is not One, or that Muhammad was not a prophet"⁹⁷.

This idea of *kufir* reflects Qutb's idea of the *jalahiliyya*, but takes a slightly different take on it. In Qutb's idea of the *jalahiliyya*, as discussed previously, discusses communities of unbelievers, and particularly

⁹⁵ Ibid, 65

⁹⁶ Ibid, 65

⁹⁷ Ibid, 71

references the Western world. In Qutb's understanding, one can see a much more decisive attack on cultural values, and societal behaviors. In the assessment of *kufir* in *Du'at la Qudat*, there is much more of a focus on the individual behaviors of an unbeliever. The previously stated definition of *kufir* also encompasses varying forms of differing belief. *Kufir* could be those who are monotheists but do not choose to accept Muhammad's role as the prophet of *Allah*, but they could also be individuals that come from polytheistic traditions, say, Hinduism or Buddhism.

Again, one must compare these views of *kufir* and the interpretations of the *jalahiliyya* and compare these to Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Al-Qaeda also draws upon Qutb's ideas of *kufir* and the *jahiliyya*. However, their reading of Qutb's ideas on these concepts tends much more towards a jihadist idea that violence is necessary to cleanse the world of such disbelief. Al-Qaeda there for calls particularly young men to the *jihad*, and the cause of martyrdom. "Almost every single interview geared toward the Arab and Muslim worlds ends with a call for those youth to come to Islam's defense"⁹⁸. In contrast, the Brotherhood sees preaching and democracy as vehicles through which the problems of *kufir* and the *jahaliyya* can be lessened. This differing of opinion on Qutb's writings can be attributed to the differing historical contexts in which the Brotherhood and Al-Qaeda operate. Al-Qaeda

⁹⁸ Ibrahim, "*The Al-Qaeda Reader*", 239

is founded during the war in Afghanistan, and therefore, *jihad* is an important concept. In contrast, the Brotherhood was more motivated to involve themselves in politics, and did not focus as much on *jihadist* literature. This, again, supports the hypothesis that Islamism cannot be understood as one movement and ideology.

Umar al-Tilemansani took the role of General Guide in 1973, and began a new phase of leadership and thought within the Muslim Brotherhood that very much reflected many of the ideas of al-Hudaybi. Al-Tilemansani saw political pressure from the government, and general lack of favor with the government as a problem for the Brotherhood that must be solved, and therefore sought to find ways that the Brotherhood could become more favorable to the government. Al-Tilemansani believed that it was appropriate for the Brotherhood to become more focused on political activism, and embrace the political system, as opposed to the focus on religious piety that had previously been a goal of the Brotherhood. This marked a changeover from what is often deemed the “old guard”—older members of the Brotherhood that lived through Egypt’s independence—and the newer members of the Brotherhood.

The new generation of leaders in the Muslim Brotherhood became

prominent in the late 1970s-early 1980s⁹⁹. The new generation also begins to look much like the Muslim Brotherhood represented in the recent Egyptian elections. The new generation's historical exposure shaped their views on the role of the Brotherhood in Egyptian politics. This generation had not experienced the oppression the movement did during Nasser's regime, but rather, had been exposed to a somewhat open political climate defined by student activist movements, particularly the *Jama'at Islamiyya* ('Islamic student movement')¹⁰⁰. Because of interactions that the new generation had much interaction with student organizations, and political activism in this sense, they became much more motivated about political activism and promoting involvement of the Muslim Brotherhood in the political scene than the previous leadership had. This is also the time when the Muslim Brotherhood officially adopts a policy of non-violence, especially after the Egyptian revolution. This is something that is often forgotten by contemporary Western audiences when discussing the Muslim Brotherhood.

As the Brotherhood enters 21st century politics, they become huge propagators of the democratic process and system, and wished to be involved in the democratic process. Tarek Osman, a journalist and scholar that wrote of the development of Egypt, claims "In the late 1990s,

⁹⁹ Zahid, *"The Muslim Brotherhood"*, 93

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 93

the...Muslim Brotherhood proposed a draft political manifesto, seen by many observers as the skeleton of an alternative constitution”¹⁰¹. In the 2005 elections in Egypt, the Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice party was the most popular political party, and looked poised to win the elections against Mubarak. The popularity of the Brotherhood was a huge factor in the “political de-liberalization”¹⁰² that occurred following the 2005 elections, and the political clout the Brotherhood gained was problematic to the current administration.

The actualities of the Muslim Brotherhood’s development are extremely different from the Western understanding of the Muslim Brotherhood. Though they have been non-violent since 1983, many Americans still understand the Muslim Brotherhood as a violent Islamist organization, an understanding that is entirely opposite of the Brotherhood’s reality. Additionally, the perpetuation of democratic ideals along with Islamist ideology completely de-bunks Western conceptions of Islamism. In popular media, there is no mention of Islamist organizations that are also democratic in nature. As the United States assesses its foreign policy goals in developing a relationship with the Middle East, it is important for them to not immediately shirk away at the thought of Islam. The Muslim Brotherhood

¹⁰¹ Tarek Osman, *“Egypt on the Brink: From Nasser to Mubarak”*, (New Haven: 2010),

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¹⁰² Mohammed Zahid, *“Egypt’s Succession Crisis”*, 162

perpetuates democratic ideals taught in schools throughout the United States. The Muslim Brotherhood has developed and changed with the times, and this supports the initial hypothesis that Islamism does not fit into one category, but rather, represents a variety of dynamic organizations.

Conclusion

This paper sought to examine Western understandings of the term “Islamism”, and assess whether the current Western notions of the meaning of Islamism, as well as its role in 21st century politics, has been correct thus far. A comparison of the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and the Muslim Brotherhood all finds that political Islam represents a variety of differing ideas. These ideologies change as the world modernizes, and each is influenced by their historical context a great deal. Al-Qaeda is a direct product of the post-Cold War international system, and the different stages of the Muslim Brotherhood all reflect key points in Egyptian history and development. The Taliban is also a direct production of their historical context, particularly with relation to the Soviet-Afghan War.

What all of this demonstrates is the necessity to refrain from treating these movements as one cohesive ideology. Rather, they represent the constant change and development within the trend of political Islam itself. Americans view Islamism and politics in the Islamic world as unchanging and

regressive. Because the American public is taught from a young age to understand the separation of church and state as a necessity in any forward-moving society, this leads to automatic rejection of the idea that a forward-moving society, and forward-thinking ideologies can exist within a religious tradition. Additionally, 9/11 further fostered negative understandings of Islamism that are not representative of the entire tradition. Within Islamism, this paper has seen complete hatred of the West and attack contrasted by indifference. We see a complete embrace of the democratic system and a vehement critique of the flaws of democracy. By no means can one lump these organizations into one category.

There is very little break in Islam between religion and politics. Because of the existence of the early *ummah*, and the continued discussion of political specifications in the Qur'an, the *hadith*, and the *sunna*, Islam holds political ideas within itself. And, when Islamist movements develop within the scope of religion, it does not mean they are developing. Careful consideration of the changes in Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and the Muslim Brotherhood illustrate the ability of Islamist organizations to change as their societies, and the world system, continues to develop and modernize. Al-Qaeda embraces the idea of a world system in the majority of its policies. The Taliban, while still holding true to their initial ideology, is in the process of

changing their own means of achieving political power to adhere to the times. The Muslim Brotherhood has embraced democracy, and wishes to spread its ideas through the democratic system itself.

These organizations demonstrate that understanding political Islam as a regressive tradition is unrepresentative of the reality. Islam itself is a discursive tradition, one that is constantly re-evaluating itself and attempting to keep up with the ever changing political systems in Islamic countries, and the broader world. To understand that because Islam does so within the constraints of religion, it implies regression, is detrimental to the relationship that the United States attempts to create with the Islamic world.

APPENDIX A- Definitions of Arabic terms

Islah- reform

Ummah- The Islamic community; a term that begins with the community governed by Muhammad

Islah- Critique, refers to a state of ensuring a state of virtue and incorruptibility

Tajdid- Reform/Renewal, use of the Qur'an and Sunna to define the true spirit of the Islamic faith

Jalahiliyya-the time of ignorance before Islam, is now used to refer to secular modernity. Qutb uses this term to refer to the current secular community, and Al-Qaeda later uses this to refer to the Western World.

Islamiliyya- the Islamic community

Fiqh- Islamic jurisprudence

Haq- truth

Batil-falsity

Kufr- an unbeliever, either an individual who does not accept monotheism, or who does not accept Islam depending on the interpretation

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